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Symposium promotes education, offers scholarships for Hispanic teens

Since 1990, when a single \$1,000 scholarship was awarded, more than \$4 million in college scholarship money has been awarded at the annual Hispanic Youth Symposium. For three days this year – April 27-29 – some 300 Idaho Hispanic teens will gather in Sun Valley at the symposium to attend scientific and educational workshops, listen to motivational speakers and vie for college scholarships worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Now in its 18th year, the Hispanic Youth Symposium emphasizes the importance of education by encouraging Hispanic teens to break the cycle of poverty and seek brighter futures for themselves and their families by staying in school.

According to the most recent information compiled by the Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs, Hispanic students in the 3rd through 10th grade continue to lag behind their non-Hispanic counterparts for proficiencies in reading, language skills and mathematics. Of Hispanics aged 25 years and over, 46 percent have attained a high school diploma.

Using a bilingual format, the focus of the Hispanic Youth Symposium is mentoring and dropout prevention, building pride in Latino culture/history and encouraging students to pursue higher education. During parts of the symposium, students will engage in problem-solving skill workshops and examine possible career paths for the future. They also will interact with peers and spend time with participants who serve as role models and mentors.

Students who attend the symposium are juniors and seniors, coming this year from 84 high schools throughout the state. Schools select those to attend based on a written essay, educational potential or need for financial assistance to stay in school.

Sponsors of the symposium are the U.S. Department of Energy, contractors at Idaho National Laboratory (INL), Gem State Diversity Initiatives and several state agencies and employers. Thirteen regional colleges and universities will participate by recruiting students, sponsoring college/career booths and awarding scholarships.

Idaho universities and colleges represented this year are the University of Idaho, Idaho State University, Boise State University, Albertson College, BYU-Idaho, the College of Southern Idaho, Eastern Idaho Technical College, Lewis-Clark State College and Northwest Nazarene University. Out-of-state universities are Montana State University, University of Southern Utah, Utah State University and Gonzaga University.

The Hispanic Youth Symposium grew out of a late 1980s brainstorming session on curbing the 60 percent dropout rate of the state's largest minority group. Since then, several thousand students have attended. The dropout rate for Latino teens in Idaho has decreased, but still remains high.

The symposium is a collaborative effort among public employers, federal management contractors, private industry, state and private educational institutions and Hispanic organizations from throughout Idaho.

Idaho National Laboratory is one of the U.S. Department of Energy's 10 multi-program national laboratories. The laboratory performs work in each of the strategic goal areas of DOE – energy, security science and environment. The laboratory is the nation's leading center of nuclear energy research and development. Day-to-day management and operation of the laboratory is the responsibility of Battelle Energy Alliance.

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INL-07-012

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